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ABSTRACT

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) annually collects information about key aspects of the undergraduate experience that college and universities can use to improve student learning. The NSSE asks students questions about their campus experiences, focusing on five clusters of activities shown by research to be linked to desired outcomes in college. These are level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environment. This report summarizes the first 2 years of this project, which now has information from more than 100,000 first-year and senior students at 470 different universities. Student experiences vary greatly, but findings support some generalizations. Schools of similar sizes differ on the student engagement benchmarks, although students at smaller colleges are generally more engaged than their counterparts attending larger institutions. A worrisome gap exists between the amount of time students spend on educational activities and the amount of time faculty members say they should be spending. Almost all students say that they occasionally ask questions in class, and most (90%) report working on projects with other students in class at least occasionally. Two-thirds of all seniors are involved in community service and volunteer work, and 72% participate in internships. Among the disappointing findings are that about one-fifth of students say that the institution gives little emphasis to studying and spending time on academic work, and 45% of students have never discussed ideas from their classes or readings with a faculty member outside of class. Three appendixes contain a list of supporting materials on the NSSE Web site, a chart of relationships among institutional reputation, resources, and NSSE benchmarks, and a list of participating institutions. (SLD)

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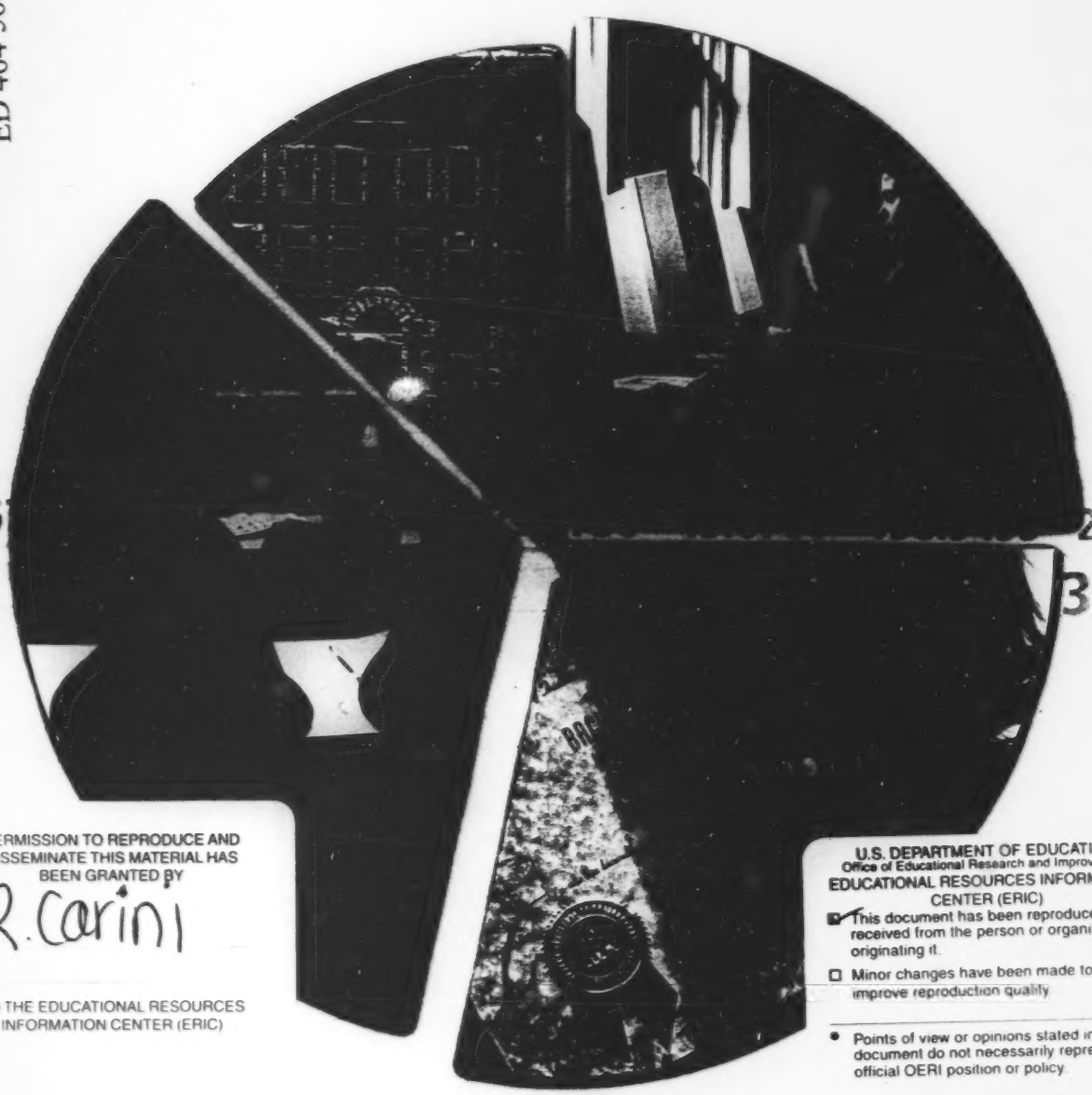
Improving the College Experience:

National Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice

ED 464 568



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NSSE 2001 REPORT

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National Survey of Student Engagement

The College Student Report

HE034884

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FOREWORD

Two years ago the Pew Charitable Trusts awarded a $3.3 million gr to Professor George Kuh at Indiana University to launch the Natio Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Our two organizations – th Pew Forum on Undergraduate Learning and the Carnegie Foundat for the Advancement of Teaching – are pleased to cosponsor the project and help interpret the survey findings to the academy and the larger public Last year NSSE's first national report presented the first-ever set of benchmarks for areas of student engagement. This second report builds on the work done in 2000 three important ways.

First, it speaks with greater authority about the nature of student engagement at f year colleges and universities, as it is based on aggregated data from 470 institutic compared with 276 schools last year. Second, some new information is introduced about academic advising, major field of study, and teacher education. Finally, the r describes how institutions and other stakeholders are beginning to use the student engagement results to bring about change. Here, in our view, is the most importan and gratifying news of all.

When NSSE was first introduced there was much discussion about how student engagement evidence could and should be used. Everyone agreed NSSE results co be a catalyst for local improvement. Others thought that NSSE's greater promise w documenting for external stakeholders features of institutional quality that were actually related to student learning. What really brought a gleam to the eyes of NS patrons at The Pew Charitable Trusts was the prospect of improving the college rankings of the national news magazines. The thinking was that by making availab evidence of student engagement, people would focus less on an institution's resou and reputation, and more on how institutions were using their resources to create experiences that are related to student learning.

Like so many other issues involving the assessment of student learning, discussion often became polarized. One camp wanted NSSE results to remain confidential an used primarily for local improvement. The other camp held that student engageme data should be used for the kind of hard-edged accountability represented by "bes college" rankings. Too often it appeared that there was little common ground in between.

We propose another way of interpreting the current context, that ACCOUNTABILIT and RESPONSIBILITY be seen as complementary processes. The first looks backwar prior performance using an external agent to examine an institution's "books" in t manner of an audit. The auditor tells the story of a college or university to others, whether they are investors, clients or regulators. By scrutinizing the institution's bal sheets, we can judge how well a school performed in the past year. In this sense, N offers an accounting of previously uninspected records of the educational experien of students. To balance the equation we also must know how an institution RESPC to the accounting of its own books. Responsibility is an internal, forward-looking activity. A responsible institution thoughtfully uses the information from an audit tc ponder new opportunities and design new initiatives. The consequences of such ac can subsequently be monitored through future accountings that use the same crite and procedures to insure accurate interpretation and appropriate action.

This second report from NSSE indicates that most of the action today reflects a combination of these two orientations. Yes, campus leaders are using NSSE results local improvement, but this frequently involves sharing the evidence with a wide ra of internal constituencies, including an institution's own governing board. And the

sharing doesn't stop at the campus border. Many institutions intend to use their NSSE results in accreditation self-studies. Seventeen consortia have voluntarily formed, searching for meaningful comparative data. Some public institutions are using their NSSE results to meet state reporting requirements on topics such as retention, general education, and civic engagement. Some institutions are putting NSSE on their Web sites and in their admissions materials.

To better appreciate the scope and promise of this work we like to think of NSSE as a lens, mirror, and window. Each offers a view of institutional performance and student behavior that helps us see important, previously undocumented dimensions of undergraduate education.

As a lens, NSSE is much like a microscope or telescope that helps make visible certain otherwise invisible aspects of the college experience. Some of the more obscure features of undergraduate education become accessible. Thus, NSSE-like instruments offer a novel and powerful way to see familiar aspects of student life and learning that are not immediately apparent to faculty members, administrators and others.

As a mirror, NSSE allows a school to see itself from perspectives not easily obtained otherwise. Three-way mirrors, such as those in clothing stores, allow us not only to see ourselves directly, but also to view ourselves in ways that normally only others can observe (often a painful experience!). So it is when institutions get their students' answers to important questions that have not been asked before.

As a window, NSSE permits us to look into other institutions, thereby offering a basis for comparison and contrast. We can compare ourselves with other schools that are more or less like us, and we can reciprocate by allowing them to look inside our institution. This yields a new sort of learning that can only be realized by comparing one's own performance against that of others.

By using NSSE as a lens, mirror, and window we can monitor the "vital signs" of undergraduate institutions, an approach that might eventually lead to a comprehensive strategy superior to traditional forms of accountability. For this reason it would be a mistake to use student engagement results to rank schools. Rankings, regardless of the criteria on which they are based, have two basic flaws. By aggregating diverse dimensions of institutional life into a single, unidimensional score, rankings wash out what's important and distinctive about and among institutions. What patient would want their physician to meticulously acquire a host of vital signs and then add them all together and give them a grade? Or worse, a rank? Rankings are particularly insidious because they imply that there are significant differences in quality among institutions whose actual vital signs are relatively close to one another.

Rather than use NSSE to improve rankings, let's use NSSE to invent approaches to accountability that offer far more promise than rankings – approaches that enable thoughtful, responsible institutional comparisons while encouraging and celebrating institutional diversity at the same time. Premature moves to sacrifice responsibility on the altar of accountability could well corrupt the enterprise and its ultimate utility for both purposes. We applaud the NSSE research team under the leadership of George Kuh, and urge it to stay the course and continue its exemplary work.

Russell Edgerton
Director, Pew Forum on Undergraduate Learning

Lee Shulman
President, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

By using NSSE as a lens, mirror and window we can monitor the "vital signs" of undergraduate institutions, an approach that might eventually lead to a comprehensive strategy superior to traditional forms of accountability.

A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

The schools participating in NSSE represent every type and size of college and university. Institutions get their own results along with comparisons that allow them to calibrate their performance against peer and national benchmarks.

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is pleased to present its second national report. As with last year, we've organize the survey findings according to five benchmarks of effective educational practice that reveal key aspects of student behavior an institutional performance that bear directly on collegiate quality.

The schools participating in NSSE represent every type and size of college and university. Institutions get their own results along with comparisons that allow ther calibrate their performance against peer and national benchmarks. To probe further many institutions are combining their NSSE results with evidence from other survey academic records, portfolios, and major field outcome assessments to develop rich, campus-specific profiles of the undergraduate experience.

Particularly gratifying is that NSSE data are helping to stimulate public conversation about institutional performance – conversations that while not always easy are alm always instructive, productive, and necessary. It's unusual and refreshing, indeed, fo faculty members, provosts, deans, and student affairs professionals to openly talk a areas at their institution they wish to strengthen, sharing what seems to be workin and what isn't. We look forward to more of these dialogues and to contribute as appropriate in order to further institutional improvement efforts.

Next year, a student engagement survey for the two-year sector comes on line, the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE). This project is based a University of Texas at Austin and is funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts and the Lumina Foundation for Education. More than 80% of the questions on the CCSSE overlap with NSSE items. Our goal is to have student engagement data from abou 1,000 four-year colleges and universities in the next few years. This information, coupled with results from two-year colleges, will provide a historic first look at how post-secondary system is performing in key areas.

This report reveals only the tip of the student engagement iceberg, so to speak. Fo example, we determined from an analysis of student responses at 125 colleges an universities that participated in both 2000 and 2001 that the institution-level resul were quite stable. Thus, we have even more confidence using these results as a so baseline against which to measure subsequent changes. More information about t analysis and other detailed information is available on the NSSE Web site including technical material that supports the major findings presented in this report [http://www.iub.edu/~nsse/html/report-2001.shtml].

Finally, we can't discover everything there is to know about the conditions that promote and characterize high levels of student engagement, learning, and educat effectiveness with a short, highly focused student survey. Along with our partners a Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the Pew Forum for Undergraduate Learning, we look forward to working with colleagues across the country who also are searching for valid, reliable indicators of collegiate quality.

George D. Kuh
Chancellor's Professor of Higher Education

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) annually collects information about key aspects of the undergraduate experience that colleges and universities can use to improve student learning. In this regard, NSSE measures something different than the "best colleges" surveys in national magazines that emphasize institutional resources, reputation, and entering student test scores. Instead, NSSE asks students questions about their campus experiences, such as their classroom participation, interaction with faculty, interaction with other students, study habits, and the school's support of their efforts.

Specifically, NSSE focuses on five key clusters of activities that research studies show are linked to desired outcomes in college. They are level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environment. Students benefit in many ways from engaging in these activities. Equally important, institutions can compare their own results to other schools and the national benchmarks to pinpoint areas to improve.

This report summarizes the first two years of the project. We now have information from more than 100,000 first-year and senior students at 470 different four-year colleges and universities.

"I've got seven kids and they've all been to college. A a concerned parent, I went t the library to look up information on the quality of the institutions they were considering. The only measur of how "good" the institutio was was how hard it was to get in, how many Ph.D.s it had, and how much it cost."

—Roy Romer,
Superintendent,
Los Angeles City Schools

KEY THEMES

While student experiences vary greatly within universities and at different kinds of institutions, NSSE findings support these generalizations:

- Schools of similar sizes differ on the student engagement benchmarks, though students at smaller colleges are generally more engaged than their counterparts attending larger institutions.
- A worrisome gap exists between the amount of time students spend on educational activities and how much time faculty members say they should be spending.

ENCOURAGING FINDINGS

- Almost all students (98%) "occasionally" ask questions in class or contribute to class discussions.
- Most students (90%) report working with other students on projects during class at least "occasionally."
- Many institutions provide first-year seminars, service learning, research opportunities, capstone experiences, and other activities to increase the frequency of student-faculty interaction.
- Two-thirds of all seniors are involved in community service and volunteer work and 72% participate in internships.
- About half of all first-year students and seniors frequently have serious conversations with students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds.
- More than two-thirds of all students rate the quality of their academic advising as good or excellent.
- About 18% of all seniors intend to teach within a year c two of graduation and these teachers-to-be were somewha more engaged in college compared with counterparts pursuing other vocations.

DISAPPOINTING FINDINGS

- About one-fifth of both first-year students and seniors sa their institution gives little emphasis to studying and spendi time on academic work.
- Forty-five percent of first-year students never discussed ideas from their classes or readings with a faculty member outside of class.
- Commuter students and part-time students view their campus environments as less supportive.

"An excellent undergraduate education is most likely to occur at those colleges and universities that maximize good practices and enhance students' academic and social engagement or effort."

—Ernest Pascarella,
Mary Louise Petersen Chair in Higher Education, University of Iowa

"NSSE is a major step forward in the ongoing quest for effective ways to assess learning outcomes, academic quality and institutional effectiveness, and we've commended it to our members."

—Thomas C. Longin,
Vice President, Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges

USING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT RESULTS

Student engagement is becoming an understandable, meaningful way of thinking a talking about collegiate quality. Institutions are comparing themselves with peer institutions and the national benchmarks to target their own strengths and weaknesses. In most cases, the results point to areas that institutions can do somet about almost immediately to improve the undergraduate experience.

Looking ahead, NSSE intends to learn more about how schools are using student engagement data and related information. In addition, we plan to identify and desc schools that successfully changed the way they work with their students to promote higher levels of student engagement.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT: A KEY FACTOR IN STUDENT LEARNING

What students gain from their college experience depends on a variety of factors and conditions. Among the more important of these is a concept we call student engagement.

Student engagement represents two critical features of collegiate quality. The first is the amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other educationally purposeful activities. The second is how the institution deploys its resources and organizes the curriculum and other learning opportunities to get students to participate in activities that decades of research studies show are linked to student learning.

Among the activities that are traditionally associated with learning are reading and writing, preparing for class, and interacting with instructors about various matters. Engagement also encompasses some other activities that are more recently recognized as being important, such as collaborating with peers on projects, problem-solving tasks, and community service.

Being engaged in these activities is valuable in and of itself. It's also an indicator of educational effectiveness.

Until recently, we lacked a way to measure these critical aspects of collegiate quality. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) was designed in 1999 to fill this void.

WHAT IS NSSE?

The NSSE (pronounced "nessie") project is both a college student survey and a new way to think about collegiate quality.

As a survey, NSSE annually assesses the extent to which students at four-year colleges and universities take part in educational practices that many research studies show are strongly associated with high levels of learning and personal development. The classic report, "Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education," indicates that level of academic challenge, time on task, and participating in other educationally purposeful activities directly influence the quality of students' learning and their overall educational experience. The NSSE survey was designed by assessment experts to measure these and related activities. Although NSSE doesn't assess student learning directly, the results from the survey point to areas where colleges are performing well and aspects of the undergraduate experience that could be improved.

To get people thinking and talking differently about collegiate quality, NSSE seeks to steer campus and public conversations toward aspects of student and institutional performance that promote learning. These include the amount of time and effort students devote to educationally purposeful activities, and what schools are doing to intentionally channel student energy to these activities. To succeed in this endeavor, many groups beyond the campus must participate in the dialogue – media, parents, students, and external agencies to name a few. It's also critical that administrators and faculty members use information about the student experience to improve undergraduate education. Fortunately, as we show later, many institutions are doing just that.

"If one believes, as I do, that engagement or involvement i a good predictor of learning, then the NSSE survey not onl gives us feedback about how well we are doing, it also hel us to diagnose weaknesses a to strategize how we can become the learning universi that we want to be."

—Robert Glidden,
President,
Ohio University

"The value of an institution li not in its resources but in ho it uses them. And about that there is a dearth of information."

—Megan Rutherford,
TIME, December 4, 2000

■ The Indiana University Center for Survey Research administers the NSSE survey using state-of-the-art methods. Random sampling of students insures that the results are comparable, meaningful, credible, and usable for institutional self-studies, peer institution comparisons, and national benchmarking.

HOW AND WHY NSSE DIFFERS FROM COLLEGE RANKINGS

"Interest is growing in alternative ways to measure an institution's strong points. Some observers worry the 'best' may really be just the biggest or richest or oldest. Lost in the rankings snapshot may be important information about the educational quality of the student experience."

—Mark Clayton,
Christian Science Monitor,
November 14, 2000

"College officials have complained for years that the rankings force them to shuffle their budget priorities and bear down on admissions officers in vain efforts to present a rosier statistical picture… "

—Amy Argetsinger,
The Washington Post,
November 27, 2000

College rankings run the gamut from lists of "hot" or desirable schoo based on anecdotes from handfuls of students to systematically collected, carefully analyzed statistics provided by institutions. But from our point of view, there are three serious drawbacks to the way mos organizations rank colleges and universities:

1) Rankings don't point to things schools can do to improve undergraduate education;

2) The rankings usually reduce institutional performance down to a single numbe that can't do justice to the multiple dimensions that make up excellence in undergraduate education, and

3) Institutional resources and reputation are the wrong things to measure if estimating the quality of the student experience is the objective.

Particularly troublesome is that the rankings are driving some institutions to do thing that are counterproductive to student learning.

To improve their ratings, some schools manipulate certain variables used in the ranki formula, such as inflating the number of applications for admission to appear to be more selective, or recalculating the number of alumni eligible to contribute to annua fundraising efforts. Even more troubling is that this vision of "quality" becomes a pe verse incentive to raise admissions standards that, in turn, intensifies the competitior for the limited pool of the "best" students. These and other efforts "to move up in th rankings" expend energy and resources that schools could more profitably focus on educationally productive activities.

Colleges and universities are complex, multi-faceted learning environments with inte tionally varying purposes, constituents, and cultures. A single number cannot capture the relevant features, no matter how complicated the algorithm. NSSE and other dat show that clusters of colleges share more or less distinctive patterns of educational effectiveness. Some institutions perform well in certain areas, but not others. Indeed, few schools excel in all areas experts would say are earmarks of educational excelle Increasingly, parents, prospective students, and the media are beginning to understa these important nuances as they seek to distinguish among institutions.

Finally, the rankings emphasize the wrong things – institutional resources and reputa tion. Resources include such things as faculty salaries, alumni giving, and entering student test scores. Reputation represents judgments of presidents, provosts, and admissions personnel. Decades of research studies indicate that these factors have little to do with educational effectiveness and tell us next to nothing about the student experience.

In contrast, NSSE data focus on something that is far more important to learning – how students actually use the resources for learning that their school provides. In fact, the NSSE benchmarks were specifically designed to measure these essential factors, which is a much different and more instructive way to think about collegiate quality than what college rankings tell us.

To illustrate this point, we compared NSSE survey results from about 430 colleges and universities with their *U.S. News & World Report* academic reputation rating and institutional resource measures. Three of the NSSE benchmarks of effective educational practice are unrelated to reputation, the variable that carries the most weight (25%) in *U.S. News* rankings (Appendix B). That is, a school's academic reputation as judged by others says very little about active learning, student-faculty interaction, and a supportive campus environment, factors that we know from many research studies are linked to desired outcomes of college.

Institutional reputation is somewhat related to level of academic challenge and enriching educational experiences. But the relationships are not strong enough to use academic reputation as a proxy for either benchmark. None of the other resource-based variables used in the *U.S. News* rating system (faculty size, faculty salaries, and alumni giving rates) are meaningfully related to any of the five benchmarks of effective educational practices.

All this suggests that the NSSE survey is tapping into something very different about the student experience and collegiate quality than what is reflected by *U.S. News* and other rankings that rely on similar kinds of information.

"NSSE doesn't rate colleges. Rather, it seeks to create a set of standards based on students' involvement in their educational experience."

—**Mary Beth Marklein,**
USA Today,
November 13, 2000

BENCHMARKS OF EFFECTIVE EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

The information reported here is based on responses from about 105,000 first-year and senior students at 470 different four-year colleges and universities from two rounds of surveys conducted in the spring of 2000 and 2001. The results from the two administrations were very similar. This is to be expected, as it will take several years of concerted effort by scores of campuses to move the measures in the desired direction.

To represent the multi-dimensional nature of student engagement at the national, sector, and institutional levels, we developed five indicators or benchmarks of effective educational practices. They are:

- Level of academic challenge
- Active and collaborative learning
- Student-faculty interaction
- Enriching educational experiences
- Supportive campus environment.

BENEFITS OF BENCHMARKS

The benchmarks are based on 41 key questions from the NSSE survey that capture many of the most important aspects of the student experience. These student behaviors and institutional features are some of the more powerful contributors to learning and personal development.

The benchmarks serve three important functions.

FIRST they're easy to understand and have compelling face validity. They resonate well with faculty members and administrators. Prospective students, parents, accreditors, and others understand what they represent. As a result, they help facilitate meaningful conversations about some essential qualities of effective educational practice.

SECOND the benchmarks empirically establish the level of student engagement in effective educational practices. They are standardized on a 100-point scale so we can compare student performance across different sectors and types of institutions and monitor progress over time.

FINALLY the benchmarks represent student behaviors and institutional conditions that colleges and universities can do something about. They are baselines for improvement – reference points that can and should be moved by intentional action by institutions and other stakeholders. As President Dean Hubbard of Northwest Missouri State University says, NSSE points to "actionable" items that can be addressed almost immediately, typically without significant reallocations of resources. Later, we'll provide examples of how schools are taking action based on NSSE results.

GENERAL THEMES

1. THE NATURE OF THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE VARIES GREATLY, BOTH BETWEEN AND WITHIN INSTITUTIONAL SECTORS AND TYPES.

■ Looking at the benchmark scores of the highest and lowest institutions, the range on academic challenge for seniors is about 22% (22 points) of the 100 point scale. For enriching educational experiences for first-year students the range is 40 points!

■ Some schools offer an unusually rich, coherent experience for first-year students. The senior year at other institutions seems highly focused and educationally robust.

■ Students at the Liberal Arts Colleges and Baccalaureate General Colleges are generally more engaged than their counterparts at the other types of institutions. That said, within the various categories of schools, student engagement also varies substantially. Indeed, the scores on all the benchmarks vary as much within a given sector as between types of institutions. For example, first-year students at a fourth of all Doctoral-Extensive institutions report a higher level of academic challenge than half of the Baccalaureate General Colleges. Likewise, 15% of Doctoral-Extensive institutions scored higher on this benchmark than the lowest third of Liberal Arts Colleges. Also, seniors at a third of Master's-level colleges and universities reported more active and collaborative learning than seniors at half of the Liberal Arts Colleges.

CARNEGIE CLASSIFICATION OF INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION*

DOCTORAL / RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES-EXTENSIVE
These institutions offer a wide range of baccalaureate programs and are committed to a graduate education through the doctorate. They award 50 or more doctoral degrees per year across at least 15 disciplines.

DOCTORAL / RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES-INTENSIVE
These institutions offer a wide range of baccalaureate programs and are committed to graduate education through the doctorate. They award at least 10 doctoral degrees per year across three or more disciplines, or at least 20 doctoral degrees per year over all.

MASTER'S COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Master's Colleges and Universities I
These institutions offer a wide range of baccalaureate programs and are committed to graduate education through the master's degree. They award 40 or more master's degrees annually across three or more disciplines.

Master's Colleges and Universities II
These institutions offer a wide range of baccalaureate programs and are committed to graduate education through the master's degree. They award 20 or more master's degrees annually in one or more disciplines.

BACCALAUREATE COLLEGES-LIBERAL ARTS
These institutions are primarily undergraduate colleges with major emphasis on baccalaureate degree programs. They award at least half of their baccalaureate degrees in the liberal arts.

BACCALAUREATE COLLEGES-GENERAL
These institutions are primarily undergraduate colleges with major emphasis on baccalaureate programs. They award fewer than half of their baccalaureate degrees in liberal arts fields.

Source: *Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2000 Edition.* (2000). Menlo Park, CA: Author.

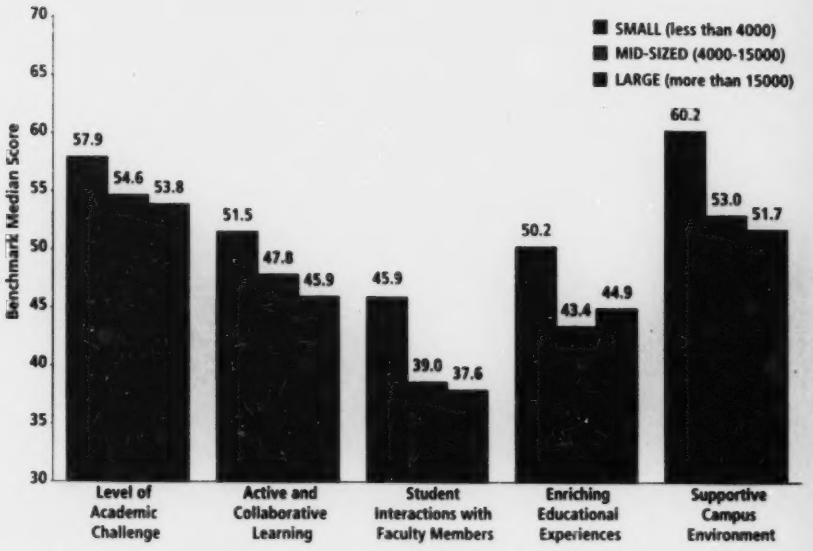
* Not all categories are listed in the table.

2. INSTITUTIONAL SIZE CAN BE A KEY FACTOR IN STUDENT ENGAGEMENT.

■ Overall, students at smaller colleges are more engaged than students attending larger institutions. Institutional size appears to be particulary important for student-faculty interaction, active and collaborative learning, and supportive campus environment.

■ However, schools of similar sizes can vary widely. This pattern holds for all benchmarks including level of academic challenge and supportive campus environment (Figure 2). So, while many small schools are very engaging, some are not. Conversely, some large universities can be highly engaging for some students, even though the typical student at large universities is somewhat less engaged compared with their counterparts at small colleges.

FIGURE 1 SENIOR BENCHMARKS BY ENROLLMENT SIZE



igure 1 *shows that the scores on the five benchmarks of effective educational practice decrease as ıdergraduate enrollment increases.*

3. EVERY SECTOR INCLUDES SOME INSTITUTIONS THAT CAN MODEL EFFECTIVE EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE FOR THEIR PEERS.

■ Schools can minimize the negative influence of factors that inhibit student engagement, such as large size, with programs that involve students more actively in their learning, such as learning communities, one or more small classes in the first year of study, and good academic advising.

■ Examples of these and other effective educational practices can be found in every type of institution – large and small, public and private, more and less selective.

FIGURE 2 VARIATION IN TWO FIRST-YEAR STUDENT BENCHMARK SCORES BY INSTITUTIONAL ENROLLMENT SIZE

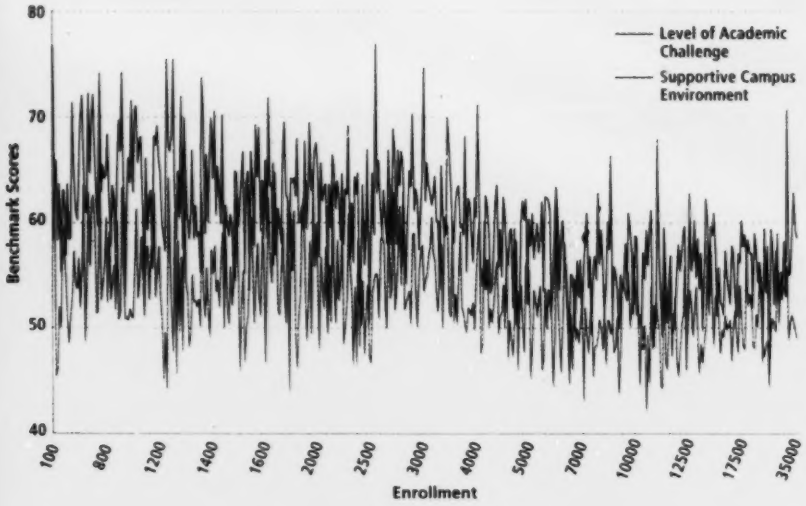


Figure 2 *illustrates that even though smaller schools generally h higher NSSE benchmark scores, wi differences exist even among institutions of comparable enrollment.*

4. A WORRISOME GAP EXISTS BETWEEN THE AMOUNT OF TIME STUDENTS SPEND ON EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES AND WHAT FACULTY MEMBERS AND OTHERS SAY IS OPTIMUM.

- Many students spend only about half as much time preparing for class as faculty members claim is necessary, about one hour for each class hour instead of two hours.
- A fifth of all of students "frequently" come to class unprepared.
- This points to a breakdown of shared responsibility for learning – on the part of faculty members who allow students to get by with far less than maximal effort and on the part of students who are not taking full advantage of the resources institutions provide for their education.

NATIONAL AND SECTOR PERFORMANCE ON THE FIVE BENCHMARKS

In discussing the results for each benchmark, we mention a few colleges and universities that are among those that perform at a relatively high level, given their mission and features such as admissions selectivity, institutional resources, size, and other relevant information. We do this to illustrate how different types of institutions are using effective educational practices with their students. Many other schools are also performing at comparable levels to those we've named. We strongly encourage all institutions to share their NSSE results and other pertinent information about the quality of their students' experience, especially what they are doing to improve undergraduate education.

Our Vice President reported results on key academic engagement factors to the faculty at the annual Faculty Retreat. The discussion launched an initiative to examine academic quality and rigor, particularly in the senior year. We formed the Committee on the Student Academic Experience to implement whatever comes out of these discussions..."

—**Bette J. Olson,**
Director of Institutional Research, Nebraska Wesleyan University

1. LEVEL OF ACADEMIC CHALLENGE

In general, Liberal Arts Colleges are more academically challenging than other types of schools. That said, it's also the case that students at certain small colleges are not challenged as much academically as their counterparts at large universities. (Figure 3). Thus, the level of academic challenge depends on the particular institution and is not necessarily similar at all institutions of the same type.

At some schools, such as Alverno College, the curriculum is the key source of academic challenge, particularly the general education component. At others the institutional mission and culture are powerful and compelling, such as Wabash College where a keenly competitive ethos is intentionally stitched into the institutional fabric to challenge students to learn more, do more, be more. And at other institutions, it's almost impossible to separate the academic program from the institution's cultural fabric, such as Loyola University of Chicago, which has a mission-driven core curriculum in the tradition of Jesuit education emphasizing argument, debate, and persuasion in an atmosphere marked by academic rigor.

DISAPPOINTING FINDINGS

- Almost half of all seniors did not write a paper of 20 or more pages during their last year of college.
- About one-fifth of both first-year students and seniors say their institution gives little emphasis to studying and spending time on academic work.

LEVEL OF ACADEMIC CHALLENGE

Challenging intellectual and creative work is central to student learning and collegiate quality. Colleges and universities promote high levels of student achievement by emphasizing the importance of academic effort and setting high expectations for student performance. Activities and conditions:

Preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, rehearsing, and other activities related to your academic program)

Worked harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations

Number of assigned textbooks, books, or book-length packs of course readings

Number of written papers or reports of 20 pages or more

Number of written papers or reports between 5 and 19 pages

Number of written papers or reports fewer than 5 pages

Coursework emphasizes: Analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience or theory

Coursework emphasizes: Synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences

Coursework emphasizes: Making judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods

Coursework emphasizes: Applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations

Campus environment emphasizes spending significant amounts of time studying and on academic work

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FIGURE 3 LEVEL OF ACADEMIC CHALLENGE

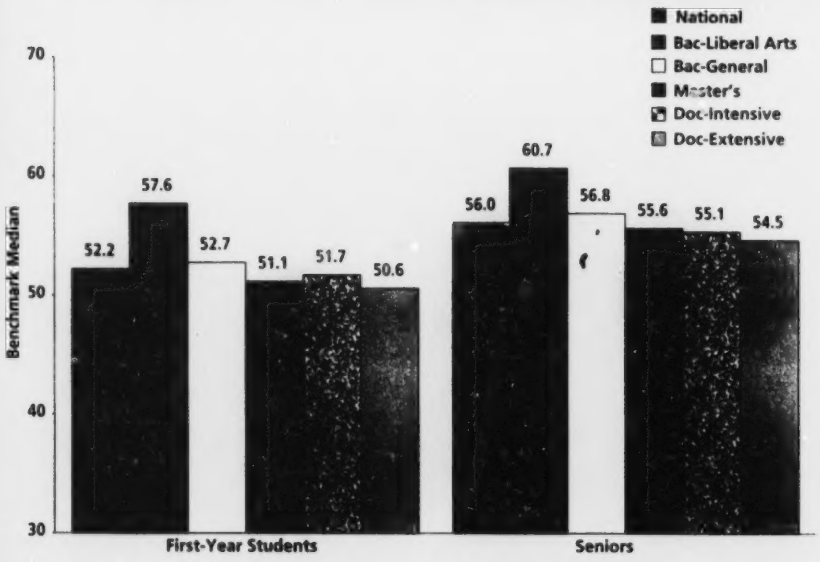


Figure 3 *shows the median benchmark scores by type of institution and for all colleges and universities combined.*

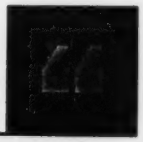
The University of Michigan expects a lot from its students, its students expect a lot from the University, and both deliver. Senior faculty members teach discipline-based freshman seminars for students entering the College of Literature, Science and the Arts and in introductory courses in the recently revised engineering curriculum.

CUNY Medgar Evers College requires a two-semester seminar of all entering students with 15 or fewer hours focusing on adjustment and academic success to meet the needs of its very diverse, non-traditional student body. The faculty motto is "creating success one student at a time," reflecting the institution's commitment to personalize the educational experience.

All first-year students at Whitman College are assigned the same book to read during the summer before matriculating which they discuss during orientation week. The first two weeks of the yearlong first-year Core Seminar is like a boot camp for writing, reading, and thinking as groups of about 14 students each meet with their faculty member three times a week.

The four-course great books Collegiate Seminar at St. Mary's College of California shapes the student experience inside and outside the classroom. Students read 12-15 classic texts per term, write multiple drafts of papers, and are expected to challenge not only their own thinking but also that of the Seminar leader who also serves as their academic advisor.

Illinois State University aspires to create an academically challenging "small college learning environment" by placing the stude at the center of the teaching and learning process. All 3,400 new students take a first-year seminar focused on intellectual inquiry in th disciplines taught by a full-time faculty member.



enn State is deeply engaged in an effort to improve the learning environment by increasing active and collaborative learning, rticipation in undergraduate research projects, and a rengthened commitment to ep and meaningful learning. NSSE provides us with high quality data that go well beyond opinions and atisfaction surveys to give us seful comparisons to similar universities."

—John Cahir,
Vice Provost and Dean for Undergraduate Education, Penn State University

2. ACTIVE AND COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

Certain forms of active and collaborative learning are becoming more evident on college campuses, perhaps as a result of clarion calls from various disciplines and national organizations to transform passive classroom venues into engaging learning environments. The evidence:

- Almost all students (98%) at least "occasionally" ask questions in class or contribute to class discussions; about two-thirds (64%) do so "frequently."
- More than two-fifths (41%) of seniors report doing community work or service learning as part of a class assignment, indicating that many schools are incorporating this powerful pedagogical approach in their academic programs.
- Most students (90%) report collaborating on projects and tasks at least "occasionally," perhaps evidence of the impact of the powerful pedagogy-collaborative learning movement (Figure 4).

As with the other benchmarks, there is considerable variation both within different types of institutions and from one type to another. One such grouping of schools is made up of about 10 Liberal Arts Colleges that are strong performers (top 15%) on all benchmarks except active learning. It's intriguing that there are some colleges with many hallmarks of educational excellence that also favor what are conventionally considered to be passive teaching practices.

DISAPPOINTING FINDINGS

- Doctorate-granting universities have the lowest median scores, suggesting that a "teaching as telling" instructional style holds sway, even in the senior year.
- About 18% of all first-year students "never" made a class presentation.

ACTIVE AND COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

Students learn more when they are intensely involved in their education and are asked to think about and apply what they are learning in different settings. Collaborating with others in solving problems or mastering difficult material prepares students to deal with the messy, unscripted problems they will encounter daily during and after college. Activities:

Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions

Made a class presentation

Worked with other students on projects during class

Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments

Tutored or taught other students

Participated in a community-based project as part of a regular course

Discussed ideas from your reading or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, co-workers, etc.)

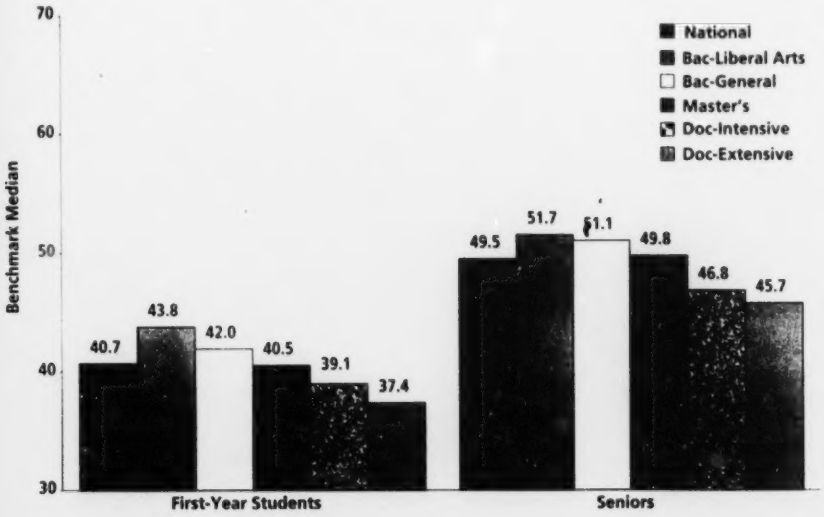


Figure 4 *shows the median benchmark scores by type of institution and for all colleges and universities combined.*

The University of Texas at El Paso infuses active and collaborative learning pedagogies throughout the institution to address the learning needs of its largely commuter, first-generation student body. Among the key interventions are learning communities and the PRAXIS program, which provides service learning and volunteerism through the curriculum.

Samford University degree programs in biology, exercise science and sports medicine, teacher education, nursing, and pharmacy use problem-based learning (PBL) strategies in all courses. Complex problems are the context and stimulus for learning as students work collaboratively in groups to explore, analyze and solve problems.

At Wesleyan College (GA), general education courses take the form of small, discussion-based seminars. Oral presentation skills are honed through a Speaking Across the Curriculum program that involves all majors. The majority of students get experience teaching and advising other students at some point through peer editing and writing programs and many more student-centered activities.

Portland State University enacts its motto, "Let Knowledge Serve the City," through community-based learning courses, starting with the freshman inquiry class and culminating with a senior capstone course where a faculty member, representative from a community agency, civic group or other organization and students team up to meet the needs of the community partner organization.

Eckerd College introduces new first-year students to active ar collaborative learning through Autumn Term, a month during whi their classes meet from 9 a.m. to noon five days a week. Group projects, presentations, and discussion-oriented pedagogies are the norm along with a community-based service project.

A small cluster of engineering and technology colleg are effectively using engaging pedagogies in the first year, includi Drexel University, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Harvey Mu College, Illinois Institute of Technol Michigan Tech, and Polytechnic University.

At North Dakota State, the NSSE data helped to confirm some long-held beliefs of npus constituents about the student experience and to refute others. We have a strong, supportive campus vironment, but other results pointed to an unacceptable ance between students and aculty. This latter finding has been the impetus for closely xamining and strengthening the Faculty in Residence program..."

—George H. Wallman,
Vice President for Student Affairs, orth Dakota State University

3. STUDENT INTERACTIONS WITH FACULTY

Substantive interactions between students and their teachers are important to a host of desired outcomes of college. Such interaction is typically much more frequent at smaller Liberal Arts Colleges and General Colleges than at larger state universities. However, the range between the lowest scoring and highest scoring Liberal Arts Colleges is almost 34 points for first-year students (about one-third of the scale), suggesting very large differences within this sector. Students wanting close working relationships with faculty members should ask the schools they are considering for evidence of the nature and frequency of student-faculty contact.

Educationally sound reasons and distinctive academic missions may explain differences between departments and schools with regard to the frequency of certain interactions between students and faculty members. For example, "occasional" conversations about career options may be sufficient if professionally trained career service personnel are available to students. But we should expect that most students "often" or "very often" get prompt feedback and discuss ideas from readings and classes outside of class with their teachers. Schools would do well to systematically reflect on and determine the desired forms and frequency of their contacts with students, taking into account the different needs of students and major fields.

DISAPPOINTING FINDINGS

- About 45% of first-year students "never" discussed ideas from their classes or readings with a faculty member outside of class.
- Half of all seniors "never" worked with faculty members on committees or in a related out-of-class venue.

STUDENT INTERACTIONS WITH FACULTY MEMBERS

Students see firsthand how experts think about and solve practical problems by interacting with faculty members inside and outside the classroom. As a result, their teachers become role models, mentors, and guides for continuous, lifelong learning. Activities:

Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor

Talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor

Discussed ideas from your reading or classes with faculty members outside of class

Worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, student-life activities, etc.)

Received prompt feedback from faculty on your academic performance

Worked with a faculty member on a research project

FIGURE 5 STUDENT INTERACTIONS WITH FACULTY MEMBERS

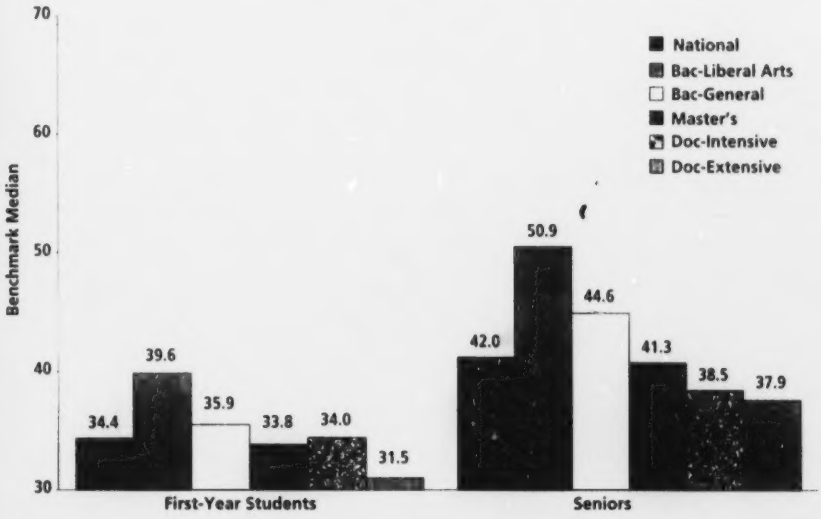


Figure 5 *shows the median benchmark scores by type of institution and for all colleges and universities combined.*

Elon University revised its curriculum several years ago, adding an extra hour of class meeting activities that gives students and faculty members more frequent contact. Elon also emphasizes a core of experiences that promotes student-faculty interaction including undergraduate research, internships, study abroad, leadership, and service learning.

At the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, 90% of the B.S. students have a paid experience supporting a research activity working with a faculty member.

Antioch College takes advantage of its small size to foster high levels of student-faculty interaction in the classroom learning, in cooperative education, and in community involvement. Narratives are used in place of a letter grading system and students and instructors meet frequently to discuss progress.

Students at Millikin University meet frequently with their faculty advisor to monitor progress through the University's Program of Student Learning curriculum – a plan of study determined by the student along with the faculty advisor. Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowships are also very popular.

Elizabeth City State Universit intentionally structures ongoing contact between students and faculty members, especially in first year as students must meet w their advisors at least six times a semester and immediately after mi term grade reports to either celebr good progress or discuss ways to improve.

The University of Kansas also intentionally creates opportunities for student-faculty contact by mandating that student constitute 20% of the membership campus policy-making committees and sponsoring "Meet-a-Professor' nights in the residence halls. Most classes (79%) have fewer than 30 students.

NSSE provided external validation to our impressions and knowledge of Loyola's aracter and encourage us to continue on our pathway to build in even more faculty-student interactions and relationships."

—Larry Braskamp,
Provost, Loyola University of Chicago

4. ENRICHING EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES

The majority of first-year students at most colleges and universities say they will participate in one or more enriching educational experiences. But there is a dramatic drop between the first and last year of college across all types of schools, indicating that many students probably do not follow through on their plans. At institutions such as Earlham College, community service is an integral part of the educational mission where 70% of all students have at least one such experience.

■ Internships are particularly popular with 72% of seniors having such a placement at some point during college. This reflects the value that students and employers place on obtaining practical experience relevant to the major or career.

■ Of all seniors surveyed, 56% had a culminating experience of some sort, indicating that colleges and universities are recognizing the importance of some form of capstone or synthesizing activity. More seniors (71%) at Liberal Arts Colleges have such an experience than at any other type of school.

■ Half of all first-year students and seniors report having serious conversations with students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

DISAPPOINTING FINDINGS

■ Only 17% of seniors studied abroad and 41% took a foreign language during college. Given the importance of understanding and working effectively with people from other countries and cultures, many more college students could benefit from such experiences.

■ The extracurriculum, once considered to be a rich reservoir of learning outside the classroom, is undersubscribed. Almost two-thirds of commuting students do not participate, nor do a quarter of all first-year students who live on campus.

ENRICHING EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES

Complementary learning opportunities inside and outside the classroom augment the academic program. Experiencing diversity teaches students valuable things about themselves and other cultures. Used appropriately, technology facilitates learning and promotes collaboration between peers and instructors. Internships, community service, and senior capstone courses provide students with opportunities to synthesize, integrate, and apply their knowledge. Such experiences make learning more meaningful and, ultimately, more useful because what students know becomes a part of who they are. Activities and conditions:

Talking with students with different religious beliefs, political opinions, or values
Talking with students of a different race or ethnicity
An institutional climate that encourages contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds
Using electronic technology to discuss or complete assignments
Participating in:
- Internships or field experiences
- Community service or volunteer work
- Foreign language coursework
- Study abroad
- Independent study or self-designed major
- Culminating senior experience
- Co-curricular activities

FIGURE 6 ENRICHING EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES

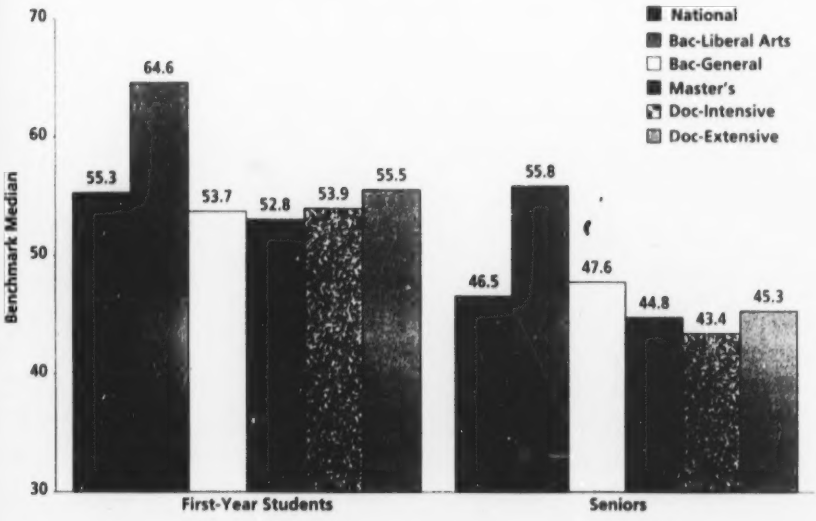


Figure 6 *shows the median benchmark scores by type of institution and for all colleges and universities combined.*

At the University of Missouri – Columbia, 89% of seniors have a capstone experience. Also, almost two-thirds of all students frequently use electronic technology to discuss or complete assignments as more than 60% of all classes have a built-in Web component.

Georgia Tech's optional co-op program involves more than 3,500 students and 600 employing organizations (including some international placements). Most engineering programs require a senior design project capstone experience which requires students to work in small teams and publicly present their work.

Macalester College features preparing students for a diverse world in its mission and this is reflected in student responses to the diversity items that contribute to this benchmark. The "Into the Streets" event that is linked to the required first-year seminar takes students into local neighborhoods to do community service. Almost half of all students participate in internships and 90% of students do a senior capstone project.

Lynchburg College intentionally exposes its students to diversity through required complementary in-class and out-of-class experiences – a one-credit "orientation to college" course that includes a service activity and cross-cultural event, requiring foreign language through the intermediate level, and a senior capstone seminar organized around an all-college theme, which this year is *War and Peace*.

Kentucky State University has successfully concentrated on enriching the first-year experience b front-loading resources through a multi-faceted approach that include a service learning initiative linked t the University 101 course, free tutorial programs, an extensive arra of peer mentors, and an early warning system for at-risk students

5. SUPPORTIVE CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT

Most students rate their institution as supportive and responsive, which is considered an important facilitating condition for learning. Small colleges pride themselves on creating a "family-type" atmosphere and most more or less succeed. Many institutions with supportive campus climates have a denominational affiliation that influences in subtle and not-so-subtle ways how the school interacts with its students. Colleges such as Cedarville, MidAmerican Nazerene, and Westmont have intentionally connected students' in-class and out-of-class experiences in ways that are mission-driven and consistent with their denominational values and beliefs.

However, there is enough variation even within small schools that this advantage is not guaranteed. Indeed, there is a small group of Liberal Arts Colleges that are among the top performers on four benchmarks but score much lower on supportive campus environment. Also, African-American and Asian-American students at larger universities are more positive about the campus climate than their counterparts at small colleges. Thus, creating a supportive campus climate is not necessarily dependent on small size. Rather, it is a function of the will to shrink the psychological size of the campus to make it manageable and welcoming.

DISAPPOINTING FINDINGS

- In general, commuter students and part-time students view their campus environments as less supportive.
- African-American and Asian-American students are less positive about their relationships with other students and with faculty members.

SUPPORTIVE CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT

Students perform better and are more satisfied at colleges that are committed to their success and cultivate positive working and social relations among different groups on campus. Conditions:

Campus environment provides support you need to help you succeed academically

Campus environment helps you cope with your non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)

Campus environment provides the support you need to thrive socially

Quality of relationships with other students

Quality of relationships with faculty members

Quality of relationships with administrative personnel and offices

FIGURE 7 SUPPORTIVE CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT

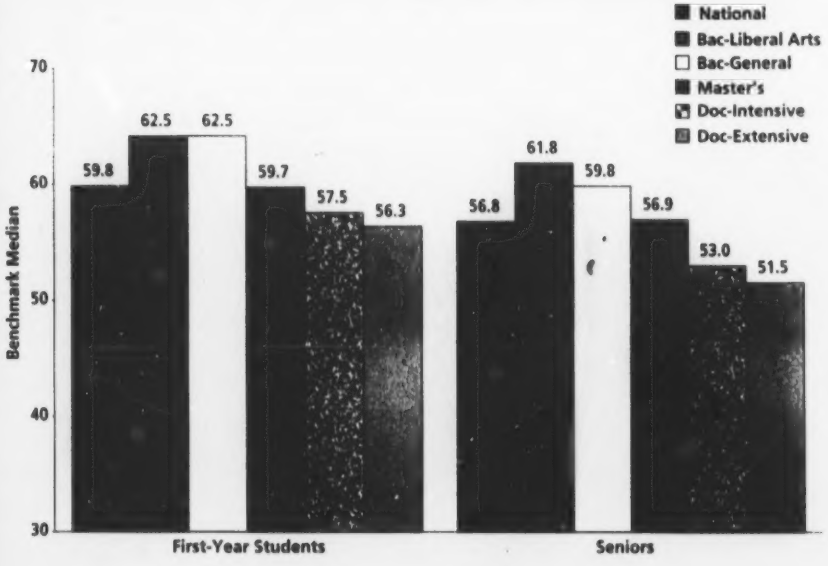


Figure 7 *shows the median benchmark scores by type of institution and for all colleges and universities combined.*

Lee University's commitment to student success begins with an "orientation to college" seminar focusing on academic skill building supported by a host of other academic and social integration programs and services – a writing center, cadre of peer instructors and undergraduate teaching assistants, and alternative chapel options to name a few. Annual faculty reviews require evidence of "service to students."

First-year students at California Lutheran University enroll in a Mentoring Seminar staffed by peers, administrative personnel, and faculty members. The quality of faculty mentoring is assessed annually as part of the annual review process.

Brigham Young University divides its 30,000 students into "campus wards" of 300 students that are further sub-divided into "families" of 10-20 students. Much of the out-of-class experience is shaped by multiple weekly events that take place within these units. BYU also brings coherence and social support to learning inside the classroom by block-scheduling students into learning communities made up of three common classes.

Texas A&M pulls many levers welcome and introduce newcomers to its rich traditions, beginning with Fish Camp, a popular orientation program in which about 4,700 students participate, an array of multicultural and mentoring service and an intrusive, effective academic advising system that is reviewed periodically by the faculty senate.

A CLOSER LOOK AT SOME KEY ENGAGEMENT ISSUES

Some aspects of the student experience are more important to engagement and learning at certain times during college. The first year of college is a critical period – the time when most students are deciding whether to persist or leave college prematurely. Good academic advising is essential.

For seniors, the major field is a dominant influence because most classes are in the major and, therefore, much of their time is spent in the company of faculty members and peers with similar intellectual interests.

Finally, because of renewed public interest in the nature and quality of teacher preparation, we also highlight the college experiences of those who plan to teach within a year or two of graduating.

FIRST-YEAR STUDENT ADVISING

One of the more important things educationally effective institutions do to promote student success in the first year of college is to provide high-quality academic advising.

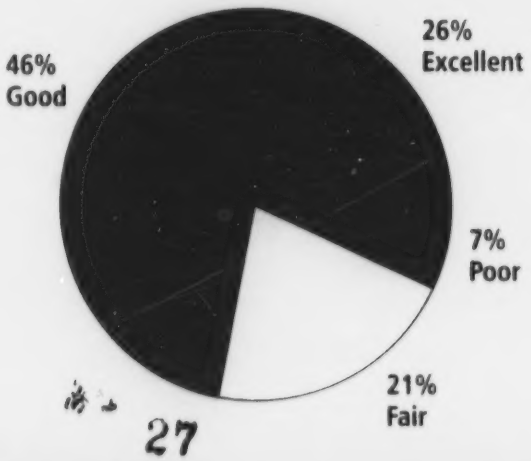
As with many other research studies, NSSE data show that students who rate their advising as good or excellent:

- are more likely to interact with faculty in various ways
- perceive the institution's environment to be more supportive overall
- are more satisfied with their overall college experience, and
- report they gain more from college in most areas.

Fortunately, students are reasonably satisfied with the quality of their academic advising. Only 7% of first-year students describe it as "poor." However, a smaller percentage (64%) of part-time, first-year students say advising is good or excellent; 12% say advising is poor.

FIGURE 8 QUALITY OF ACADEMIC ADVISING FOR FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS

Figure 8 *indicates that first-year udents are fairly well satisfied with academic advising.*



STUDENT ENGAGEMENT: DOES MAJOR FIELD MATTER?

During the final year of their studies, most students are concentrating on courses in their major field. Because of their disciplinary content and cultures, the major can shape student engagement in distinctive ways.

TABLE 1 AVERAGE SENIOR BENCHMARK SCORES BY MAJOR

Benchmark	Level of Academic Challenge	Active and Collaborative Learning	Student Interaction with Faculty Members	Enriching Educational Experiences	Supportive Campus Environment
Highest Tier	Humanities (61)	Architecture (55)	Physical sciences (54)	Foreign languages and literature (58)	Agriculture (59)
	Architecture (59)	Education (54)	Biological sciences/ life sciences (48)	Multi/Interdisciplinary studies (57)	Humanities (59)
	Multi/Interdisciplinary studies (58)	Health-related fields (52)	Humanities (46)	Humanities (51)	Parks, recreation, leisu studies, sport management (58)
	Health-related fields (58)	Parks, recreation, leisure studies, sport management (52)	Multi/Interdisciplinary studies (46)	Communications (51)	Education (57)
Lowest Tier	Mathematics (53)	Social sciences (47)	Public administration (38)	Liberal/general studies (43)	Visual and performing arts (55)
	Parks, recreation, leisure studies, sport management (52)	Public administration (46)	Business (36)	Business (42)	Engineering (53)
	Computer and information sciences (51)	Liberal/general studies (46)	Computer and information sciences (35)	Computer and information sciences (42)	Computer and information sciences (51)
	Agriculture (49)	Computer and information sciences (45)	Liberal/general studies (35)	Agriculture (42)	Architecture (51)
Median	56	48	39	47	56
Standard Deviation	14	16	21	17	19

- Student-faculty interaction has the greatest range, from 54 for physical scie majors to about 35 for liberal and general studies majors.
- Architecture majors score high on active learning but fall to the lower tier o majors for supportive campus environment.
- Agriculture and parks and recreation majors score high on supportive camp environment but relatively low on academic challenge.
- Liberal and general studies majors report less interaction with faculty, perha because the faculty members who teach courses that contribute to the major more committed to their primary disciplinary home and students.

As part of testing the new criteria and accreditation process for SACS, Radford University is developing a Quality Enhancement Plan to improve student learning and engagement and NSSE results an integral part of that plan (www.radford.edu/~irpa.)."

—Rick Slavings,
Acting Vice President for Planning and Research, Radford University

THE NEXT GENERATION OF TEACHERS

There is growing public interest in the next generation of teachers.

The NSSE 2001 survey asked students, "Do you intend to teach at some pre-kindergarten through high school level within a year or two of completing your degree program?" About 18% of all seniors said, "yes." About 73% of these teachers-to-be majored in education.

Are teachers of the next generation more or less engaged than their counterparts who pursue other vocations? For the most part, they are more engaged.

- They scored higher on two benchmarks (active and collaborative learning, supportive campus environment) and comparable on the other three relative to peers pursuing other vocations.
- They got a good dose of practical experience through tutoring, community work, internships and related assignments such as pre-service field placements and student teaching.
- They contributed to class discussions more frequently.

What about teachers-to-be who majored in education? Many teacher education programs are perceived to be of questionable quality, despite efforts over the past decade to increase rigor and become more selective in admissions. Compared with their peers majoring in other fields who intend to teach, education majors scored:

- Lower on enriching educational experiences, including diversity experiences.
- Lower on student-faculty interaction.
- Higher on active and collaborative learning.

- Perhaps the lower score of education majors on student-faculty interaction is partly because education faculty members do not work directly with seniors during the time when the seniors are student teaching, leaving much of the supervision to the host school system.
- African-American education majors who intend to teach scored higher than their white counterparts on active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, and enriching educational experiences. Almost half of these African-American students attended historically black colleges and universities.
- Interestingly, there are no differences at Liberal Arts and General Colleges in the benchmark scores of teachers-to-be who majored in education and those who plan to teach but majored in other fields. Such differences exist at other types of institutions.

HOW SCHOOLS AND STAKEHOLDERS ARE USING NSSE RESULTS

All 470 four-year colleges and universities that administered the NSSE survey have received customized reports including comparison information for other similar schools and their raw data. Many are doing additional local analyses and integrating NSSE results with other institutional records or information from other surveys. NSSE is performing additional analyses for dozens of colleges and universities at their request.

Here's what we've learned so far about how schools are using their results.

1. DIFFERENT GROUPS ON AND OFF THE CAMPUS SEE THE BENCHMARKS AS IMPORTANT, RELEVANT INDICATORS OF COLLEGIATE QUALITY.

- For many colleges and universities, NSSE is the only source of student engagement information. About 85% of the schools that have told us how they are using their NSSE results expect to refer to them in self-studies and accreditation reports.
- Some states are incorporating NSSE data as an indicator of institutional effectiveness, such as the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education's "Key Indicators of Progress Project" and the University of Wisconsin System Accountability Report.
- **Adams State**, **Longwood College** and other institutions are using their NSSE results to meet state performance indicator requirements related to persistence and graduation rates, general education, student learning, and civic engagement.
- **Miami University** and **Brigham Young University** are using NSSE data to develop descriptions of contemporary campus life for alumni publications. **Randolph Macon Women's College**, **IUPUI**, the **University of North Carolina** and other schools put student engagement results on their Web sites.

PARTICIPATING STATE AND UNIVERSITY CONSORTIA

NSSE 2000	NSSE 2001	NSSE 2002
CUNY	Connecticut	California State University
Indiana	Hawaii	Connecticut
Maryland	Indiana	Indiana
Massachusetts	Kentucky	Massachusetts
Missouri	Missouri	Missouri
New Jersey	North Carolina	New Hampshire
University of Texas	Texas A&M	New Jersey
West Virginia	Wisconsin	South Dakota
		University of Texas

"This was the first survey at our College in which everyon on campus received the resul The information prompted a series of productive discussior about the general education program and academic expectations, especially for first-year students."

—**Jerome Ward,**
Associate Director of Institutional Research, Sweet Briar College

"NSSE is an invaluable tool fc us in responding to the revise WASC accreditation guideline and reconceptualizing the objectives for our entire educational program – curricular and co-curricular programs, pedagogy, and the campus culture..."

—**Pamela Jolicoeur,**
Provost, California Lutheran University

ıe ability to monitor progress within UMBC, as well as enchmark against our peers, gives versatility to NSSE data. NSSE is one of my leads as I ılk about curricular reform at UMBC, and we'll be highlighting our NSSE results this year at the President's annual retreat."

—**Arthur Johnson,**
ɔvost, *University of Maryland Baltimore County*

The design of the NSSE, with its concern for the entire :ampus experience, has been ʏ beneficial in allowing us to prioritize the points for scussion and action. It allows the student life and the academic personnel to begin ım a common understanding of the current situation."

—**Thomas Mann,**
Academic Dean,
St. Vincent College

2. COMPARISONS WITH PEER INSTITUTIONS AND THE NATIONAL BENCHMARKS REVEAL ASPECTS OF INSTITUTIONAL AND STUDENT PERFORMANCE NOT READILY AVAILABLE FROM OTHER SOURCES.

So far, two general approaches have emerged in using NSSE data for benchmarking. One or both may be appropriate, depending on the circumstances discussed below.

■ The first is a normative approach, with schools comparing their students' responses to those of students at other colleges and universities.

The **University of Wisconsin-Stout** is incorporating NSSE results in materials submitted for consideration for Baldridge Quality awards. Provost Robert Sedlak told us:

"The NSSE data were a real eye-opener for us. In discussing the results with each academic department, I ask faculty members how they think a student in their class might respond to the questions and then ask them how they would like the students to respond.... We're always looking for "best in class" types of benchmark data and NSSE helps us identify some of those indicators."

■ The second approach to benchmarking is criterion referenced, where an institution examines its school's performance against a predetermined value or level that it deems appropriate for its students, given its mission, size, curricular offerings, funding, and so forth. **Southwest Texas State University** is pursuing an aggressive, comprehensive strategy for using NSSE data. According to Robert Smallwood, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs:

"We've used a discipline-specific, criterion-referenced approach when looking at levels of engagement across departments... For example, we asked ourselves, "What should be the level of collaborative learning activities in the College of Liberal Arts?" Do we want 50%, 60% or 70% of our seniors to report "often" or "very often" that they work with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments?

3. NSSE RESULTS POINT TO THINGS INSTITUTIONS CAN DO SOMETHING ABOUT – ALMOST IMMEDIATELY.

■ The president of **Georgia Tech** created a $250,000 seed grant fund as an incentive to stimulate more student-faculty collaboration on research.

■ As with many other schools, **Juniata College**'s NSSE data revealed numerous strengths but also a few areas that an institution with high aspirations wants to improve. According to Provost James Lasko:

"We intentionally tried to become more 'writing intensive' as a part of a curricular reform in 1995 and NSSE data demonstrate that this was successful. That said, we're focusing on the sharp difference between seniors and freshmen. Senior scores on four of the five benchmarks were higher than predicted and higher than our peer institutions. Freshmen, on the other hand, had lower predicted composite scores... Because many of our freshmen take large lecture biology and chemistry courses, the faculty members in those areas are using a new technology this year – the 'Class Performance System.' It's described as a 'virtual hand-raiser' because the instructor can get immediate feedback from the entire class on the degree to which concepts are understood and gives students more opportunities to participate."

■ **Columbia College**, a women's college, is using NSSE results to leverage several innovations, according to Linda Salane, Vice President for Strategic Planning:

"The results highlighted many areas where we achieved at the highest levels, such as collaborative learning (an area previously cited for excellence with the Hesburgh Award). The survey also pointed out areas for improvement....

As a result we've begun to implement the following:

- A four-year general education plan that incorporates signature course work in the freshman year, learning communities in the sophomore year, mentoring and/or service learning in the junior year, and capstone experiences in each major in the senior year.
- An Office of Community Service to support and encourage service learning.
- An Office of Leadership and Globalization to support and encourage student study abroad and faculty development of study abroad programs."

■ To push improvement efforts down to the department or major field level, faculty members must believe that the results accurately represent the experiences of their students. The **University of Missouri-Columbia** analyzed its results at the major field level for just this reason. For this purpose an ample number of respondents from various areas is needed to be confident in the reliability of the results. As a result, more colleges and universities are adding students to their samples.

"NSSE is a great way to stimulate reflection and debat about what we do more and less well, and why. For us, it's proving an exciting and enlivening tool for self-reflection and self-improvement."

—**Michael McPherson,**
President, Macalester College

"Students and faculty workinc at our Center of Inquiry in the Liberal Arts have begun an inquiry into precisely what the various residential settings contribute to an effective liberal arts education. The dimensions of the NSSE survey contribute to a definition of 'effective' and provide significant comparative data o a topic where there is surprisingly little reliable material."

—**Andrew Ford,**
President, Wabash College

We'd been discussing the role of computing in our general education requirements and e need for a more formalized freshman curriculum; NSSE results helped suggest directions to take on both of these issues."

—**Michael Sawdey,**
Interim Provost,
Aurora University

"Holy Family College is a commuter institution that vants to enhance the sense of campus community. The Activities Coordinator and Community Services Coordinator are using NSSE data to establish a cioser working relationship among udent groups. The results also prompted the Counseling and Health Services Directors to develop a peer counseling intervention."

—**Sister Patrice Feher,**
Vice-President for
Student Services,
Holy Family College

4. NSSE PROVIDES A LEXICON FOR TALKING ABOUT COLLEGIATE QUALITY IN AN UNDERSTANDABLE, MEANINGFUL WAY.

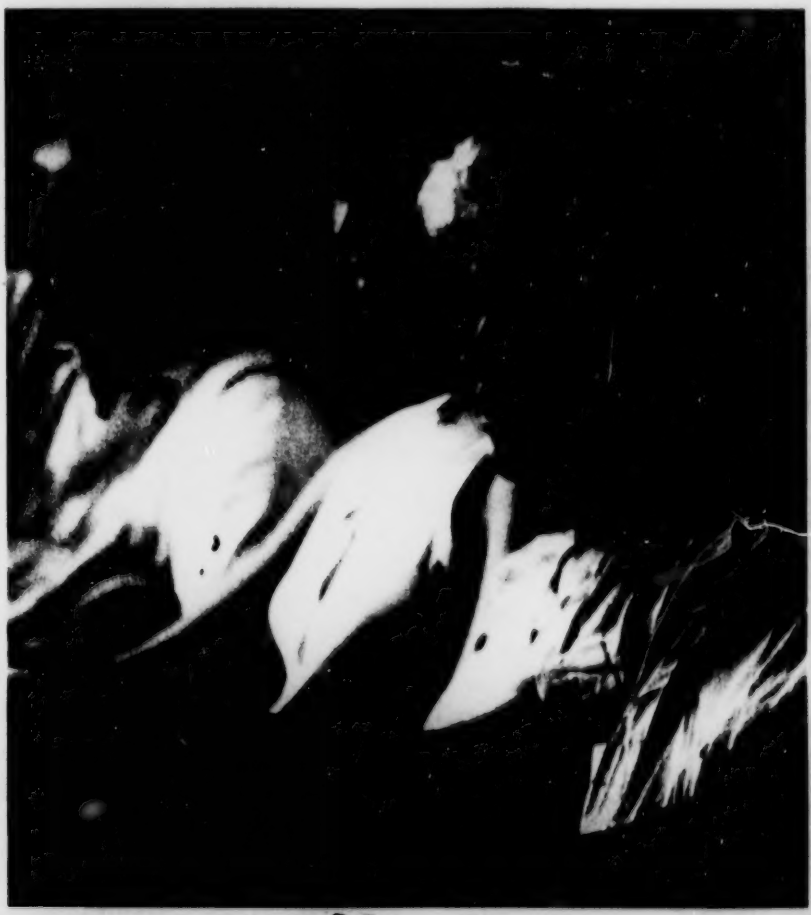
■ The survey questions are plainly stated and allow faculty members, senior administrators, student life professionals, trustees, students, and others to talk with one another about strengths and weaknesses.

■ Because NSSE results are fairly easy to interpret; schools distribute them widely – to faculty members, academic administrators, students, governing board members, and others – using written summaries, e-mails, Web site postings, and meetings.

■ Schools as diverse as **Wabash College**, **Ohio University**, **Macalester College**, **North Central College**, **Penn State**, **California Lutheran University**, **Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis**, and the **University of Maryland Baltimore County** are using NSSE data to inform academic reviews and strategic planning processes related to teaching and learning.

5. NSSE IS A VEHICLE FOR COLLABORATION, WITHIN AND ACROSS INSTITUTIONS.

■ NSSE data provide insight into aspects of the undergraduate experience that help academic administrators, institutional researchers, and student affairs professionals focus on issues of common interest:



- how students spend their time,
- the nature and frequency of peer interactions and student-faculty contact outside of classroom,
- the experiences of different groups of students (part-time students, commuter students, fraternity or sorority members, students of color).

■ In the first two years, 17 consortia formed to share information. The consortia represent very different types of institutions – women's colleges, urban universities, members of the Coalition of Christian Colleges and Universities, engineering colleges, and research universities. Schools in two consortia exchanged student-level records after removing individual student identification information. One group was composed of four public universities in Ohio, the other about 15 Doctoral Extensive Universities.

■ NSSE results can be linked with information from academic transcripts, retention studies, focus groups, and results from other surveys to develop a rich, comprehensive picture of the undergraduate experience.

■ **Loyola University of New Orleans**, the **University of Montana**, and the **University of Wisconsin-Green Bay** are using NSSE data to predict persistence by linking first-year student engagement data with sophomore fall enrollment records (e.g., www.uwgb.edu/iresearch/NSSERetentionResearch_files/v3_document.htm).

"We've hosted two statewide conferences of about 25 public and private universities in Texas to share how NSSE results can be used to facilitate improvements in student learning."

—**Robert Smallwood,**
Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, Southwest Texas State University

"Drake University is using its NSSE results to better understand the contributions of student and academic affairs to the undergraduate experience by weaving together information from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) and NSSE. The information provides a common frame of reference for collaborative efforts between academic and student affairs..."

—**Jerry Price,**
Dean of Students, Drake University

OTHER USES FOR NSSE RESULTS:

Assessing the quality of general education.

Assessing the impact of learning communities, such as freshman interest groups, intensive freshman seminars, and orientation to college courses.

Assessing the quality of senior capstone courses and internships.

Sharing NSSE data with academic advisors so that they can help students better manage their time and use other academic resources.

Incorporating NSSE results into relevant faculty and staff development workshops and retreats, such as those sponsored by the local chapter of The Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.

Organizing campus symposia around the topic of student engagement.

LOOKING AHEAD

NSSE is an important step in he right direction – to look at ıeasures of actual educational experience, rather than inputs such as SAT scores that are ɔnly rough proxies for the real thing. And it's certainly much etter than rating colleges and ıiversities by relative wealth!"

—Kathryn Mohrman,
President, Colorado College

Student engagement is the right concept at the right time. NSSE is not a college rating system, nor does it measure student learning directly. Even when valid measures of learning are available, schools will still need NSSE or something like it to identify areas that need attention in order to improve.

Most important, NSSE is providing useful, reliable information that colleges and universities are using to evaluate and strengthen the quality of their undergraduate programs. Prospective students, parents, media personnel, and others are beginning to thoughtfully incorporate student engagement in their search for evidence of collegiate quality.

Finally, we don't minimize the challenges that lay ahead. Improving student learning requires much more than the results of an annual survey. This is why NSSE aims to join with other like-minded people and organizations to identify and describe transformative exemplars, schools that have intentionally changed the way they work with their students to promote higher levels of student engagement that translate into higher levels of learning and personal development. And we also need to link student engagement data with valid outcome measures of student learning. Along the way, we'll surely discover additional activities and institutional factors that need to be assessed and improved. We're very much looking forward to the journey.

RESOURCES

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APPENDIX A

SUPPORTING MATERIALS ON NSSE WEB SITE

For more detailed information about the following topics, please visit the NSSE Web site at:

HTTP://WWW.IUB.EDU/~NSSE/HTML/REPORT-2001.SHTML

- Copy of NSSE's survey instrument, The College Student Report
- Student responses to NSSE benchmark questions by first-year students and seniors and by Carnegie classification
- Closer look at some key engagement issues including academic advising, major field of study, and teacher preparation
- NSSE 2000-2001 benchmark percentiles and descriptive statistics by first-year students and seniors and by Carnegie classification
- Creating the NSSE benchmarks of effective educational practice
- Comparison of selected resource and reputation variables and NSSE benchmarks
- NSSE conceptual framework and overview of psychometric properties

APPENDIX B

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN INSTITUTIONAL REPUTATION, RESOURCES, AND NSSE BENCHMARKS

	Level of Academic Challenge	Active & Collaborative Learning	Student Interaction with Faculty Members	Enriching Educational Experiences	Supportive Campus Environment
First-Year Students					
U.S. News Reputation	.32*	.05	-.05	.16*	.01
% Full-time Faculty	-.03	-.05	-.10	-.04	-.01
% Class < 20 students	-.04	.21*	.31*	.10*	.01
Student-Faculty Ratio	-.10	-.17*	-.12*	-.05	-.01
Faculty Salary	.12*	-.04	-.03	.10*	.04
Alumni Giving Rate	.13*	.02	.02	.06	.12*
Acceptance Rate	-.17*	.15*	.14*	-.02	.01
Graduation Rate	.23*	-.09	-.20*	.01	.10*
Seniors					
U.S. News Reputation	.18*	.00	-.03	.14*	.00
% Full-time Faculty	-.06	-.05	-.05	-.07	.01
% Class < 20 students	.03	.13*	.20*	.09	.07
Student-Faculty Ratio	-.11*	-.05	-.13*	-.06	-.05
Faculty Salary	-.02	.04	-.04	.08	-.06
Alumni Giving Rate	.06	.00	-.03	.04	.07
Acceptance Rate	.00	.14*	.19*	.09	.13*
Graduation Rate	.02	-.08	-.24*	-.10*	.07

*p<.05, two-tailed

Note: Correlations involving reputation are controlled for sector, Carnegie classification, Educational and General spending, undergraduate enrollment, urbanicity, proportion living on campus, proportion full-time, mean student age, proportion women, proportion different major fields, and proportion different races/ethnicities. Correlations involving all other measures also control for Barron's admissions selectivity.

PPENDIX C

ARTICIPATING NSSE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

ene Christian University
ns State College
phi University
ka Pacific University
rtson College of Idaho
d University
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nia College
no College
rican University
lo State University
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lachian State University
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rn University Montgomery
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n Peay State University
r University
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ng Green State University
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rnia Polytechnic State University
rnia State University, Bakersfield
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rnia State University, San Bernardino
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al Michigan University
al Missouri State University
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iam College
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ville Bible College
ollege of the City University of
ew York
Clark University
Clarkson University
Colgate University
College of Charleston
College of New Jersey
College of Notre Dame of Maryland
College of St. Catherine
College of St. Scholastica
College of Staten Island of the City University of New York
College of the Holy Cross
College of William & Mary
College of Wooster
Colorado College
Colorado State University
Columbia College
Columbia College Chicago
Concordia College - Ann Arbor
Concordia University - Portland
Concordia University - Saint Paul
Concordia University Irvine
Concordia University Nebraska
Concordia University Wisconsin
Connecticut College
Corcoran College of Art and Design
Covenant College
Daemen College
Davis & Elkins College
Denison University
DePaul University
DePauw University
Dickinson State University
Dominican University
Drake University
Drexel University
Earlham College
East Carolina University
Eastern College
Eastern Connecticut State University
Eastern Kentucky University
Eastern Mennonite University
Eastern New Mexico University
Eckerd College
Edgewood College
Elizabeth City State University
Elmhurst College
Elmira College
Elon University
Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University
Endicott College
Evergreen State College
Fayetteville State University
Florida Atlantic University
Florida Institute of Technology
Fort Lewis College
Framingham State College
Franklin & Marshall College
Franklin Pierce College
George Fox University
George Mason University
Georgia College & State University
Georgia Institute of Technology
Georgia Southwestern State University
Georgia State University
Gonzaga University
Gordon College
Goucher College
Graceland College
Greensboro College
Greenville College
Grove City College
Gustavus Adolphus College
Hamilton College
Hamline University
Hampden-Sydney College
Hardin-Simmons University
Harris-Stowe State College
Harvey Mudd College
Hastings College
Heidelberg College
Heritage College
Holy Family College
Houghton College
Howard Payne University
Hunter College of the City University of New York
Huntingdon College
Illinois Institute of Technology
Illinois State University
Indiana University Bloomington
Indiana University East
Indiana University Kokomo
Indiana University Northwest
Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis
Indiana University Southeast
Indiana Wesleyan University
Iowa State University
Jacksonville University
Jewish Hospital College of Nursing & Allied Health
John Brown University
John Carroll University
John Jay College of Criminal Justice of the City University of New York
Johnson State College
Judson College, Alabama
Judson College, Illinois
Juniata College
Kansas State University
Kean University
Keene State College
Kent State University
Kentucky State University
Kettering University
Keuka College
La Salle University
Laboratory Institute of Merchandising
Lafayette College
Lake Forest College
Lamar University
Lawrence University
Lebanon Valley College
Lee University
Lees-McRae College
Lehman College of the City University of New York
Lewis & Clark College
Lewis University
Longwood College
Loyola College in Maryland
Loyola Marymount University
Loyola University Chicago
Loyola University New Orleans
Lynchburg College
Lyndon State College
Macalester College
Madonna University
Malone College
Manchester College
Marshall University
Marymount College
Marymount Manhattan College
Marywood University
Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts
Medgar Evers College of the City University of New York
Meredith College
Miami University
Michigan State University
Michigan Technological University
MidAmerica Nazarene University
Millikin University
Minnesota State University Moorhead
Monmouth University
Montclair State University
Moravian College
Morehead State University
Mount Mary College
Mount Union College
Murray State University
Nebraska Wesleyan University
New College of Florida
New Jersey City University
New Mexico State University
New School University
New York City Technical College of the City University of New York
North Carolina A&T State University
North Carolina Central University
North Carolina State University
North Central College
North Dakota State University
Northeastern Illinois University
Northeastern University
Northern Illinois University
Northern Kentucky University
Northern Michigan University
Northland College
Northwestern State University of Louisiana
Northwestern University
Norwich University
Occidental College
Oglethorpe University
Ohio Northern University
Ohio State University

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kota State University
Southeastern University
Southern Arkansas University
Southern Connecticut State University
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville
Southern Utah University
Southwest Texas State University
Southwestern College
Southwestern University
Spelman College
Springfield College
St. Bonaventure University
St. Cloud State University
St. Edward's University
St. Joseph's College, New York (Brooklyn Campus)
St. Joseph's College, New York (Suffolk Campus)
St. Lawrence University
St. Mary's Academy & College
St. Mary's College of Maryland
St. Olaf College
St. Thomas University
State University of New York at Binghamton
State University of New York at Buffalo
State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry
State University of New York Stony Brook
Stillman College
Suffolk University
Susquehanna University
Sweet Briar College
Syracuse University
Tarleton State University
Teikyo Post University
Temple University
Texas A&M International University
Texas A&M University
Texas A&M University at Galveston
Texas A&M University-Commerce
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi
Texas A&M University-Kingsville
Texas A&M University-Texarkana
Texas Christian University
Texas Lutheran University
Texas Tech University
Towson University
Trinity Christian College
Truman State University
Tulane University
Unity College
University of Alabama at Birmingham
University of Arizona
University of Arkansas
University of California Santa Cruz
University of Central Arkansas
University of Central Oklahoma
University of Colorado at Boulder
University of Colorado at Denver
University of Delaware
University of Dubuque
University of Florida
University of Hawaii - West Oahu
University of Hawaii at Hilo
University of Hawaii at Manoa
University of Houston
University of Idaho
University of Iowa
University of Kansas
University of Kentucky
University of Louisville
University of Maine
University of Maine at Farmington
University of Maine at Presque Isle
University of Maryland, Baltimore County
University of Maryland, College Park
University of Maryland, Eastern Shore
University of Massachusetts Amherst
University of Massachusetts Boston
University of Massachusetts Dartmouth
University of Massachusetts Lowell
University of Michigan
University of Minnesota Duluth
University of Mississippi
University of Missouri-Columbia
University of Missouri-Kansas City
University of Missouri-Rolla
University of Missouri-Saint Louis
University of Montana
University of New Mexico
University of North Carolina at Asheville
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
University of North Carolina at Charlotte
University of North Carolina at Greensboro
University of North Carolina at Pembroke
University of North Carolina at Wilmington
University of North Dakota
University of Pittsburgh
University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg
University of Puerto Rico in Humacao
University of Puget Sound
University of Richmond
University of San Diego
University of South Carolina
University of South Dakota
University of Southern Indiana
University of Tampa
University of Tennessee
University of Texas at Arlington
University of Texas at Austin
University of Texas at Brownsville
University of Texas at Dallas
University of Texas at El Paso
University of Texas at San Antonio
University of Texas at Tyler
University of Texas of the Permian Basin
University of Texas Pan American
University of the Ozarks
University of the South
University of Toledo
University of Tulsa
University of Utah
University of Virginia
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire
University of Wisconsin-Green Bay
University of Wisconsin-La Crosse
University of Wisconsin-Madison
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh
University of Wisconsin-Parkside
University of Wisconsin-Platteville
University of Wisconsin-River Falls
University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point
University of Wisconsin-Stout
University of Wisconsin-Superior
University of Wisconsin-Whitewater
University of Wyoming
Ursinus College
Ursuline College
Utah State University
Vassar College
Villanova University
Virginia Commonwealth University
Virginia Wesleyan College
Wabash College
Wagner College
Wartburg College
Washington State University
Wayne State University
Waynesburg College
Webb Institute
Weber State University
Wells College
Wesleyan College
West Texas A&M University
West Virginia University
West Virginia University Institute of Technology
Western Carolina University
Western Connecticut State University
Western Kentucky University
Westminster College
Westmont College
Wheaton College
Whitman College
Wilkes University
William Carey College
William Jewell College
William Paterson University of New Jersey
Wilmington College
Winston-Salem State University
Winthrop University
Wofford College
Woodbury College
Worcester Polytechnic Institute
Wright State University
Xavier University of Louisiana
York College of Pennsylvania
York College of the City University of New York

NOTES:

NSSE FACTS

Project Name: National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)

Partners: NSSE (pronounced "nessie") is supported by a grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts and institutional participation fees. NSSE is cosponsored by The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the Pew Forum on Undergraduate Learning. NSSE also works closely with personnel from the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS).

Survey Name: The College Student Report

Data Sources: Randomly selected first-year and senior students from hundreds of four-year colleges and universities. Supplemented by other data sources such as institutional records, results from other surveys, or data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS).

Administration: Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research and Planning in cooperation with the Indiana University Center for Survey Research.

Key Objectives: Provide data to colleges and universities to use for improving undergraduate education, informing state accountability and accreditation efforts, and facilitating national and sector benchmarking.

Audiences: College and university administrators, faculty members, and governing boards; external authorities such as accreditors and government agencies; prospective students and their families; college advisors, institutional researchers, higher education policy makers.

Participants: More than 155,000 students at 470 different four-year colleges and universities thus far. About 350 schools are registered for the 2002 program.

Cost: Participating colleges and universities pay a fee ranging from $2,500 to $5,500 depending upon undergraduate enrollment.

NSSE STAFF

Director
George Kuh

Project Manager
John Hayek

Assistant Project Manager & Research Analyst
Michael Boye

Research Analysts
Robert Carini
Robert Gonyea
Chun-Mei Zhao

Project Associates
Brian Bridges
JoAnne Bunnage
Patrick O'Day
Megan Palmer

Administrative Secretary
Debbie Lane

Webmaster
Douglas Zukunft

Project Support Assistants
Jennifer Chapman
Michael DiLisio
Maureen Griffin
Melanie Smith

IU CENTER FOR SURVEY RESEARCH STAFF

Director
John Kennedy

Associate Director
Nancy Bannister

Business Manager
Donna Hackney

Project Manager
Cheryl Burke

Web Designer
Clayton Mabbitt

Computing Assistant
Nicholas Bannister-Andrews

Field Director
Jennifer Inghram

13 45 76 24 13 26 16 27 85 88 92 37 45 75 43 22 15 24 31 02 63 85 96
12,546,234

National Survey of
Student Engagement
Indiana University
Center for Postsecondary
Research and Planning
Ashton Aley Hall 102
1913 East Seventh Street
Bloomington, IN 47405-7510
Phone: 812-856-5824
Fax: 812-856-5150
E-mail: nsse@indiana.edu
Web: www.iub.edu/~nsse

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